# NEBRASKA COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

1964 - 1999

35 YEARS

#### HISTORY OF THE COMMISSION MOVEMENT

nited Nation's activities as early as 1959, expressing concern about the status of women around the world, led to the founding of what is now the National Association of Commissions for Women.

The history of the Commission movement began in December 1961 when President John F. Kennedy signed the order establishing the President's Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW). The idea to have a Commission was Esther Peterson's, then Director of the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau. She persuaded the President to make Eleanor Roosevelt, an inspired choice, vice chair. After the PCSW's report, *American Women in 1963*, there came the realization that the work for women's equality had only begun. Much needed to be done in the states and local areas before women achieved their basic rights.

In 1963, President Kennedy also created the Interdepartmental Committee on the Status of Women and the Citizen's Advisory Council on the Status of Women. One of the central recommendations in the President's Commission's 1963 report was that each state form a similar commission on the status of women. The Business and Professional Women's Foundation made it a priority to set up State Commissions. They were soon joined by several other women's organizations. The Women's Bureau Regional Administrators worked right along with these organizations toward establishing Commissions.

In 1962, even before the President's Commission issued its report, Michigan had set up the first State Commission. Soon it was followed by the state of Washington and then other commissions were rapidly established. Most Commissions were created by executive order at the time. The majority were not legislatively mandated.

The National Conference of Governors' Commissions on the Status of Women was subsequently convened in 1964-66. Regional conferences were held in 1967, by which time every state, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia had a Commission. The Women's Bureau, in the early 60's, sponsored the Annual National Conference of Commissions. Then, in 1970, at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference of the Women's Bureau, the Commissions (by mutual agreement) formed their own organization, the Interstate Association of Commissions for Women (IACSW). Also, in the early 70's the movement for local Commissions gained momentum. Starting with local Commissions in Wisconsin and Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in the late 60's, the movement exploded. More and more local Commissions were created.

The IACSW continued annual meetings from 1969-1975. In 1975 they convened a constitutional convention in Chicago. The by-laws were changed and the Interstate Association of Commissions on the Status of Women became the National Association of Commissions for Women (NACW), which expanded to include city and county

commissions. In the transition the Women's Bureau gave technical assistance and now has a liaison role to all commissions, whether or not they are members of the NACW.

NACW has continued holding annual meetings since 1975. The National body provides a concerted voice to deal with the needs and concerns of women and their families through legislative action, serving on national advisory committees, participating with other organizations and presenting testimony at public hearings. These mechanisms are in place to ensure equality for women under the law.

# "On Behalf of Nebraska Women"

#### The Commission is Born

In 1961, the President's Commission on the Status of Women was created by executive order of President John F. Kennedy. Individual states were encouraged to organize commissions to meet their specific needs.

In 1964, Evelyn Rankin, Business and Professional Women's President from North Platte and Sarah Jane Cunningham, National Business and Professional Women's President from McCook asked for a meeting with Governor Frank Morrison to discuss the formation of a Governor's Commission on the Status of Women. During their Saturday meeting, Governor Morrison agreed to issue an Executive Order establishing a Commission. Commissioners were appointed by the Governor with all organization matters, including the election of officers, left to the membership. A blizzard hit Nebraska on the day of the 1<sup>st</sup> Commission meeting. Sarah Jane Cunningham, unable to attend due to the weather, was drafted as the first Chair. The first several meetings were spent on brain storming, goal setting and organizational structure.

Sarah Jane Cunningham directed 39 commissioners and their committee work in the following areas: Security of Basic Incomes, Education and Counseling, Home and Community, Women in Employment, Labor Standards, Women Under the Law, and Women as Citizens.

Aileen Black became the Governor's Commission's second Chair in 1965. In addition to promoting legislation for women, the Commission held an honors dinner to recognize Nebraska's outstanding women. Besides encouraging tours, family outings, and involvement by women, the Commission saw three major needs: to encourage more women to seek public office, to support education for women, and to help minority women to enter positions of responsibility. During this period, the Commission secured its funding through donations.

From 1966 to 1969, the Commission witnessed several changes under the leadership of Anne Campbell. In 1966, committees were combined leaving Education and Counseling, Employment and Income Security, Home and Community, and the Finance Committee which raised \$551.22 to cover that year's expenses. Several publications were released which included a pamphlet on the Commission's goals and objectives, a pamphlet designed to assist guidance counselors in Nebraska schools, a Commission progress report sent to the Governor and the "Nebraska Women Through the Years" booklet. The Commission also successfully promoted legislation that established a minimum wage law and issued guidelines for employee hiring and training.

In 1967, Governor Tiemann continued the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, allowing \$500 to cover annual expenses. During that same year, several pieces of legislation were promoted, including the successful promotion of an equal pay for equal work bill. Thirty states had already adopted such legislation to reinforce the Federal Equal Pay act, which regulated transportation, communication and manufacturing. Only one-third of Nebraska's working women were covered by this because most did not work in these areas. The legislature also repealed the special protective labor laws that had limited the fields open to women workers.

Another legislative advancement advocated by the 1967 Commission was the passage of a bill eliminating discrimination in jury selection. Until this legislation passed, eleven counties in Nebraska had practiced such discrimination. They had neglected to appoint women jurors since many courthouses lacked facilities for women. Also passed was a bill repealing laws providing women with special exemptions from jury service because of their sex.

The Commission's Education Committee supported the establishment of a Library School at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, in an effort to broaden the vocational opportunities open to women, and appointed an historian to organize and preserve relevant information. The first statewide women's conference, entitled "Women and Men: Partners in Progress," was attended by 227 people, and attempted to alert Nebraskans of the opportunities in re-training and volunteer work.

#### Growing Pains

In 1968, the Commission reorganized itself to strengthen its efforts in improving the status of Nebraska women. A Talent File Committee was created to determine qualifications for membership, and to recommend more women to appointive offices. In addition, a By-Laws Committee was established to investigate possible changes, and an Historical and Publication Committee was appointed to distribute Commission related materials to schools and libraries.

Under the new 1969 chair, Melba Scott, the Commission sponsored a *Womanpower* Conference with Libby Koontz as keynote speaker. This workshop encouraged closer communications between the Commission and women's organizations across the state. Over 300 persons attended and were honored for their outstanding contributions. Under Melba's direction, a photo contest, *The Many Faces of Nebraska Women*, was sponsored to promote public awareness of women's contributions to the state. The contest attracted almost 200 entries. At the national level, the Interstate Association of Commissions for Women was established.

In 1970, the Commission elected Helen J. Haggie as its chair. In her second term in office, Helen Haggie witnessed dramatic change in the Commission. Governor James Exon successfully recommended that the Commission be a statutory state agency in 1971, and legislative statute LB 819 was approved by the Legislature. In addition to being recognized as a state agency, state funding was received to carry out the Commission's projects and to reimburse Commissioners for travel expenses. During that same period, the Commission developed a code of ethics for employers of household workers. A brochure was also printed, entitled *Household Workers: Hi or Goodbye*.

In 1972, Nebraska became the second state to pass the ERA. Under the leadership of Chair Virginia Portsche, the Commission worked for its ratification.

Also, in 1972, as part of its program to reach and represent the women in Nebraska, seven hearings were held across the state to allow women the chance to speak out about issues of concern to them. The Commission, now budgeted \$5,000 for the year, was divided into six committees: Communications-Public Relations, Education and Counseling, Employment and

Income Security, Home and Community, and Women Under the Law. The Women Under the Law Committee sponsored a computer examination of Nebraska Statutes for discriminatory laws, and lobbied successfully for their change. The Priors Club, an organization of former Commission members, was established and led by Rose O'Brien Lute.

In 1973, again under the leadership of Virginia Portsche, a reunion conference of the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women members was held. One hundred seventy-five past members and 31 current members met to discuss *Women of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* and *The Women Who Care*.

Ethel Kirwin was elected Chairperson in 1973 and served for two consecutive years. Under her leadership the Commission's priority was the establishment of Mayor's Commissions on the Status of Women across the state. Commissions were established in Scottsbluff and Columbus, following the steps of Omaha whose Commission was already in existence.

1974 was a year of organizational changes. The Commission organized a budget, goals and programs, leased office space and looked for an Executive Director, whom they hired that fall. In September of 1974, Jean O'Hara was hired as the Commission's first Director and an office was opened in the Terminal Building, Lincoln, Nebraska. This office became an information center for Nebraska women. An ETV Series on Nebraska Women and the Law was produced in cooperation with the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities during that same year.

Several publications were researched and written. They included: *Nebraska Women and the Law, Meet the Nebraska Commission on the Status of Women, Nebraska Civil Rights Law and How It Affects Women,* and *Sex Equality in Education*. The Talent Bank Committee expanded their activities, a monthly newsletter was developed and Nebraska International Women's Year was initiated and coordinated by the Commission.

## Name Changes

The Nebraska Legislature in 1975 changed the Commission's name to the Nebraska Commission on the Status of Women. The legislation sponsored by Senator Shirley Marsh, lowered Commission membership to 30 and established membership districts based on Supreme Court Districts. No more than half of the members were to be from one political party under the new legislation. The Commission also received authority to apply for federal funds.

Shirley Wilken became Chairperson of the Nebraska Commission on the Status of Women in 1976. By that year, the office housed three permanent and four grant-funded employees. The Commission's Committees were conducting projects regarding Talent File, education, employment, home and community, law and communications.

Three surveys were conducted during the 1976-77 fiscal year. One questioned Nebraska Vocational Education institutions on non-traditional education. Credit discrimination was explored in a survey of 50 lending institutions and 98 mental health agencies were questioned regarding their services to women. Results were published.

The Nebraska Commission on the Status of Women researched the implications of Federal laws on Nebraska, and spearheaded a review of Nebraska statutes to eliminate discrimination.

Under Ms. Wilken's guidance the Commission focused on increasing its visibility. They provided speakers at the request of 50 organizations and distributed over 30,000 copies of their booklets and flyers. The newsletter mailing list rose from 150 to ,650 names and the staff answered thousands of letters and phone calls as the public became aware of women's needs and facilities.

In 1976, the Commission turned to television to reach the public. They found funding from the Nebraska Committee on the Humanities and produced eight half-hour shows on Nebraska Women and the Law.

The Nebraska International Women's Year Coalition was initiated and coordinated by the Commission. Publicity about the event included women in Nebraska's history. The stories and pictures were collected into a book entitled *Women of Nebraska - Hall of Fame*.

Vice-Chairperson, Virginia Coffey, assumed the position of Chairperson when Ms. Wilken died and continued Ms. Wilken's programs. A major accomplishment under Ms. Coffey's leadership was the addition of the Women's Employment Opportunities Division, which was funded by the State Department of Labor and was directed by Celeste Wiseblood.

During their first year of existence, WEOD held seven workshops, did extensive research on women in the labor force, and developed a task force of employers.

In 1976 Maxine Burnett Moul became the Chairperson of the Commission and her special focus was public awareness.

Eighteen public service radio spots were produced and television public service announcements were purchased from the Vermont Commission on the Status of Women, promoting job hunt skills. A series of four one-hour ETV programs entitled *Cast Me Woman* were produced and 40 accompanying viewing groups were organized across the state.

Four major studies were completed and distributed including a *Vocational Education Report*, *What's In It For You, How to Find a Job, the No-Fault Divorce Report*, and the *Female Offender Survey*.

Flyers were written and distributed regarding Nebraska Commission on the Status of Women publications, WEOD, and Women in appointive Office. As the Commission reached out, women' involvement in commission programs increased. The Talent File increased women's appointments to commissions and boards from 19% to 27%.

In 1977 another division was added to the Commission, Counselors Expanding Career Options (CECO), organized under a grant from the U.S. Office of Education, and placed under the direction of Project Director Twila Christensen-Liggett. CECO collected, researched and tested equal educational materials for use in classrooms and held workshops for educators and others.

During fiscal year 1977-78, two chairs directed the Commission. Clody Wright, Omaha, served as Chair until her move to Oregon in December. Catherine Nore followed Clody as Chair. During this year the Commission was involved in a number of exciting projects including the continuation of the Women's Employment Opportunities Division. This Division carried on a Women's Bureau type of activity in Nebraska. Additionally, the counselors expanding the Career Options Project was nearing completion of *The Whole Person Book: Toward Self-*

*Discovery.* The Commission housed two other projects: 1) a Women Under the Law Project that researched and wrote a series of legal guides for women and 2) a Domestic Violence Project to inform Nebraskans about spouse abuse and to establish local community volunteer groups to assist victims and centers in providing service.

The year also saw many other projects including a credit caravan that toured three major cities, Kearney, Grand Island and Scottsbluff. The Commission researched and published a Profile on Displaced Homemakers in Nebraska as well as a report on non-traditional job options for female offenders. Legislative activities included passage of a comprehensive Victims of Domestic Violence Assistance Act, name change and insurance discrimination laws, as well as the defeat of legislation eliminating certain standards for day care.

Under the Woman and Law Project, several publications were produced informing women how to use their legal rights effectively. These were: Women and Name Change, Cutting the Knot; How to Survive a Divorce, To Have and To Hold; Money Matters; Child Support in Nebraska; Termination of Parental Rights; Women and the Social Welfare System and Social Security; and Alternatives for the Battered Woman Guide.

In other educational employment areas reports distributed included: Rural Women; Women in Post Secondary Education; Minority Women and Girls; Mature Woman Fact Sheet; and the Directory of Women's Employment and Related Resources.

In 1978-79, Ruth Kruse, Lincoln, oversaw the Commission and its activities. An education/employment planning meeting workshop was held in November to discuss appropriate needs and goals of women in education/employment. A number of groups attended including business, state, universities, colleges and women's groups. A statewide needs assessment was conducted by the Commissioners in their respective communities and districts and distributed through the Commission's newsletter mailing list in the early Spring. The results were used in the 1979 Program Planning workshop to reset NCSW program priorities.

#### Growing By Leaps and Bounds

The Counselor's Expanding Career Options Project completed their grant and the NCSW office received notice that *The Whole Person Book* was approved for national distribution in 1979. In other grant news, the Commission applied for and received an 18-month grant to research women's marital property rights and to conduct fifteen workshops to share the findings with the women in Nebraska.

The Commission's exposure to the public was being expanded with the development of a Speakers bureau and flyer. Speeches in the areas of employment, marital property rights, career options, minority women, and current legislative issues were available. A slide film presentation on the Commission was developed for statewide circulation.

Displaced homemakers were also of concern to the Commission with the introduction of legislation to create a Nebraska Displace Homemakers Act. After successful passage, the Commission assisted in the creation of the Omaha and Grand Island Displaced Homemaker Centers.

The Commission expanded interagency cooperation with other state agencies. Monthly meetings with women agency representatives of the Nebraska Department of Labor Women's Affairs Specialist, U.S. Women's Bureau Representative and the Vocational-Education Division of the State Department of Education were held.

In 1979-80, Connie Clark, Lincoln, took the Commission in a new direction. As with previous chairs, Connie gave her special emphasis to the Commission. Women in crisis situations were added to the list of concerns. Patricia Kain Knaub, PH.D. at UN-L was commissioned to design a survey, analyze the results, and prepare a report which was entitled *Women-in-Need Survey*.

Marital property laws provided another major focus for the Commission during those years. In between conducting 15 workshops in the fall and another 15 in the spring, the three member grant funded staff researched and published many publications on women's property rights in Nebraska. These ranged from calculating the value of a housewife to the complexity of estate planning.

As always, legislation remained a priority for the Commission. 1979-80 was a very successful session for women in Nebraska with the passage of a No-Fault Divorce Reform Bill. In addition, legislation was defeated which would have allowed a foreclosure on property for a deceased spouse's debts when the surviving spouse was unaware of the debt. The staff maintained a legislative clearinghouse on national and state bills affecting women.

The first Nebraska celebration of Women's History Week was initiated with a proclamation signing ceremony in the Governor's Hearing Room.

A minority women's project included workshops aimed at minority women and their job skills. The job hunt workbook was a major foundation for these workshops and a Minority Skills Bank was initiated.

## NCSW Visibility Increases

In 1980-81 Shirley Trauger, Exeter, chaired the Commission and its activities. Women in crisis were still a major focus. Five public service announcements were prepared for TV and radio on Women-In-Crisis. A new publication, "Need a Friend" was developed. This publication listed services available for women in Nebraska.

A new Speakers Bureau flyer was developed by the Commission and distributed to Chambers of Commerce, libraries and women's groups. Requests for speakers from NCSW increased greatly with property rights being the number one request.

Another new publication, *Nebraska Women...Getting Your Fair Shake*, was developed by the Marital Property Rights Grant staff after many hours of research. This publication had three volumes: Marriage, Divorce, and Widowhood and answered many questions about women's property rights.

An Attitudinal Survey on Chemical Dependency was conducted in 1981. Dr. Wilma Grumley, UNL Professor of Journalism, worked closely with the Commission in planning and setting up the survey. Each Commissioner surveyed four women in their area on attitudes towards chemical dependency.

The Commission emphasized cooperation with other state agencies and networking with women's organizations throughout Nebraska. NCSW continued to explore ways to take programs to Nebraska women.

In 1981-82 Shirley Trauger, Exeter, was re-elected as Chair of the commission. This new year showed an increase in the visibility of the Commission. Commissioners and staff spoke to over 120 groups throughout the state on a variety of issues including widowhood, divorce, spouse abuse, non-traditional jobs, discrimination in employment, sexual harassment, property rights, and other laws affecting women. This reflected a 26% increase in filled requests for speakers.

NCSW's first State Fair Booth was designed and worked by Commissioners and staff. The booth was partially responsible for the increased visibility of the Commission.

Another major highlight of the year was the passage of the Nebraska Equal Opportunity in Education Act, prohibiting sex discrimination in public educational institutions. The combined efforts of women across the state, representatives of education institutions, and State Senators, working together, passed this bill 43-0 on March 17<sup>th</sup> and it was signed into law at a joyous celebration on March 19<sup>th</sup>.

Staff, at the direction of the Employment/Education Committee, initiated Brown Bag Luncheons for Clerical Workers. A planning committee of volunteers from other state agencies was formed to continue on with this project.

NCSW officers and staff traveled to eight western Nebraska communities to acquaint Nebraska women with the work and importance of NCSW. We met with 272 women and re-affirmed the commitment to work for and with women throughout Nebraska. An interest was expressed in forming Women's Councils in some communities.

Marolyn Robson, York, became Chair in 1982-83. A highlight of the year was the Omaha, Kearney and Lincoln Economic Hearings on the Status of Women, co-sponsored with the Unicameral's Business and Labor Committee.

Northeast Nebraska was the setting for NCSW's second informational caravan. Commissioners and staff visited with over 160 women in Norfolk, Wayne, Tekamah and Fremont and heard the concerns of women in this part of the state.

The establishment of a statewide Task Force on Child Support collection to investigate the problem of enforcement and explore solutions was initiated during 1982-83. NCSW's Home, Community and Personal Crisis Committee presented a panel discussion about Women in Crisis to clergy in Albion and York.

During fiscal year 1982-83 NCSW received a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau to staff an on-going "Operation Talent Bank" and to hold a one-day "Job Fair" entitled "Women and Work: How to Survive in the 80's" This innovative program coordinated by NCSW, the Omaha YWCA Displaced Homemaker Program and an Advisory Committee of representatives from 23 organizations and employers assisted disadvantaged women and displaced homemakers to connect with employment in the private sector. This project provided on-going linkages between business/industry/government and employable women in Nebraska. In 1984 Job Fairs were held in Scottsbluff, North Platte, Grand Island, Lincoln and Norfolk. Grants from the Department of Labor and Department of Social Services provided a financial base for these Job Fairs.

A series of Women's Legislative Forums, sponsored by NCSW, were conducted in Scottsbluff, North Platte, Grand Island, O'Neill, Omaha and Lincoln. Two NCSW legislative priority bills were passed by the Nebraska Legislature this year. One strengthens the child support collection procedures and the other prohibits the use of sex-differentiated tables for determining state and county retirement benefits. Both bills were passed because of the combined efforts of women across the state, representatives of many organizations and State Senators working together.

The National Association of Commissions for Women requested that NCSW and the Lincoln/Lancaster Commission on the Status of Women conduct a series of four training sessions at the national conference in Gary, Indiana. To accompany the session, a national "How To Organize" manual that includes organizational basics, public relations, political strategies and funding and fundraising was developed.

Jean O'Hara, NCSW Executive Director, was elected to the Board of Directors of the National Association for Commissions on Women at the national conference in Gary, Indiana.

1983-84 continued NCSW's commitment to provide information, referral, advocacy and coordination with other women's groups. Legislative Forums in Lincoln, North Platte, Grand Island, Scottsbluff, and Norfolk; Women's History Week, and a Woman-Power Conference provided opportunities for cooperative efforts with the many and diverse organizations that focus on women's issues.

Joyce Dixon of Omaha chaired the Commission 1984-85. In January 1984, NCSW sponsored a "Woman-Power" conference in conjunction with the League of Women Voters and Nebraska B.P.W. A grant from the Woods Foundation provided funds for the event which was held at the newly built and just opened Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln.

NCSW's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration was held in March 1984 with a reception at the Governor's Mansion and a gala dinner in the Capitol Rotunda.

Ada Munson of Lincoln was the chair for 1985-86. Program Goals for 1985 included efforts to improve economic, legal rights and opportunities for women, networking with service agencies, development of regional commissions, and continued development of the Nebraska Women's Foundation.

#### Disaster Strikes and Women Rally

The first Women of color Conference was held in Lincoln in May 1985. As the Conference convened, the Nebraska Unicameral cut the budget of the Commission to \$0.

During the 1985-86 year, the NCSW under the leadership of Ada Munson, and the Nebraska Women's Foundation, under the leadership of Joyce Dixon, raised funds to keep the Commission functioning. The staff of 8 was reduced to 2 – a Director and a Secretary; and the office was moved from a suite of offices on the third level to a small storage room on the lower level of the State Office Building. The NCSW members agreed to retain a few functions and to make arrangements for many others to be dropped or transferred to other agencies or organizations. The Domestic Violence programs were transferred to the Department of Social Services and the Displaced Homemaker program went to the Department of Education. Jean O'Hara, who had served as Director for 12.4 years resigned and moved to Denver. Chris Funk, former Director of the Lincoln-Lancaster Commission, was hired to carry on the work and organize a refunding effort.

The 1986 Legislature refunded the Commission at 40% of the previous budget. Under the leadership of Lynne Friedewald, 1986-87 Chair, a decision was made to concentrate on issues related to balancing work and family responsibilities.

A research and demonstration grant was provided by the U.S. Women's Bureau, Department of Labor. Kearney was selected as the area to study. Child care was identified through a survey developed and implemented by the Department of Sociology at UNL. An advisory committee guided the first phase, and an Action Team carried out the eight recommendations that were produced from the survey. The local Action Team took the project as their own and have set up a Child Care Resource Center.

Forums across the state continued the legislative information sharing begun in previous years and the Annual Women of Color Conference was maintained.

Sonya McCollister was selected as Chair for 1987-88, but found that she could not continue and her term was completed by Marion Moscrip of Alliance.

Chris Funk, who had served as Executive Director through the refunding process of 1986 and the two-year budgeting effort, resigned and Rose Meile assumed the duties of Executive Director in late August 1987.

## Rebuilding

uring Women's History Month, an art exhibit was held in the State Office Building featuring women artists from across the state of Nebraska. NCSW also contacted the State Senators and they participated in Women's History Month with a different Senator reading into the record each morning of the session something about a woman who made a significant difference in their life.

Commissioners continued the work on the "Balancing Work and Family" project in Kearney, developed a series of radio PSA's, focused on child and dependent care, and guided their energies to rebuilding the NCSW. Marion Moscrip served as chair through the 1988-89 year.

NCSW and the Women's Bureau Department of Labor conducted a mini-survey in two rural communities – Alliance and Broken Bow, and convened groups to address the issues associated with women in rural areas. A group was also assembled in Scottsbluff. Staff and commissioners met with these groups known as Community Commission Representatives every three months to discuss needs and resources.

Velma Hill, Natalie Gendler, and Yvonne Mathews, all commissioners from Omaha, developed an Advisory Board to explore ways to launch a program called the Omaha Women's Employment Network. This program will focus on job preparation for unemployed and underemployed women in the Omaha – Douglas County area.

Task Forces were formed which included commissioners and others from women's organizations statewide. The task forces addressed issues in categories: Justice, Health, Family, Economic, Education and Funding of Advocacy.

An Interest and Skills Bank was created through a survey of women across the state. The information was entered into a computer data base and created a talent pool across the state that could be drawn from for workshops, training, seminars, task forces, and appointive offices.

Natalie Gendler, Omaha, was chair 1989-91. During 1989 *The Women's Organization Directory* was computerized and made available to the public. It replaced the old printed directory that was constantly out of date due to changes in officers, etc.

NCSW's Clerk II position was upgraded to Administrative Assistant and the Public Information Technician position was upgraded to Public Information Officer. At this time, under NCSW's Executive Director, Rose Meile the staff had expanded to 3 and ½ persons plus a dedicated volunteer, Carolyn Jackson, who brought NCSW into the computer age.

NCSW celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a display in the State Office Building and and Anniversary Celebration at the March Quarterly Meeting.

A series of workshops offering training for professional and personal development for clerical workers was provided by NCSW. these workshops focused on upgrading skills, self-esteem, assertiveness and inter-personal relations in an effort to promote upward mobility.

During Women's History Month, NCSW conducted an Art Show featuring young Women Artists from the Colleges and Universities in Nebraska. Women's History Month was celebrated in

1989 with special recognition for a woman making history, Governor Kay Orr, the first woman governor of Nebraska. On "International Day of the Woman" Governor Kay Orr and all of the women Senators were recognized as Women Making History by being presented with a tulip arrangement funded by the Nebraska Women's Foundation.

*"A Celebration of Color: Cultural Pride"* was the theme of the 1989 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Women of Color Conference held in Grand Island. The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Women of Color Conference was also held in Grand Island and the theme was *"Nebraska Women of Color...For a Change."* 

In 1990 NCSW hosted the "Equality Day" Celebration at Southeast Community College. The celebration featured workshops on women's equity issues and a stage performance depicting the life of several famous Nebraska suffragists.

The Nebraska Women's Information Network (WIN) consisting of representatives of women's organizations from across the state was established and met quarterly for the purpose of sharing information, discussing issues and promoting legislation that affects women in an effort to promote full equality for women.

During Women's History Month1990, NCSW held a Poetry Event. NCSW elicited poetry from Junior and Senior High School students across the state. The poems addressed a woman who was significant in their lives. Three selections were chosen and read by the authors during a youth event in the Capitol Rotunda. A paper bound book was published of all the poetry submitted and distributed to the schools, legislators, libraries and interested parties.

## Statute Changes to Include Families

ayle Hanna, Valentine, chaired the Commission from 1991-93. During her leadership, NCSW went before the legislature to update NCSW's statute. The scope was expanded and statute changed to include women and their families.

NCSW published a handbook for women who want to influence public policy. It was entitled "Informed and Organized Is Armed and Dangerous." This handbook was used in workshops that NCSW held for women across the state interested in the legislative process.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Women of Color conference, "Women of Color in the 90's – Lifting As We Climb" was held in Omaha.

NCSW became actively involved with the York Center for Women. NCSW began holding a quarterly meeting at the facility (which has become an annual tradition) in order to talk with incarcerated women regarding conditions and needs. Assessing and supporting the needs of incarcerated women and girls at the York and Geneva facilities has been a priority of the Commission.

The Commission worked with State Senators toward the passage of the Family Medical Leave Act. The Commission was involved in committee work and mobilized women across the state to support the legislation.

In 1992, NCSW met with women senators and worked with them to organize Sexual Harassment Hearings. NCSW brought women in from across the state to testify at the hearings. Throughout the year NCSW continued to educate Nebraska's policy makers and kept a public focus on sexual harassment.

The Commission organized a Women's Action Network consisting of contact women in each legislative district to inform people in their districts regarding issues and legislation of concern to women and their families.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Women of Color Conference was held in Omaha in 1992.

A new computer data base was added at the Commission. It established a Boards and Commissions data base that could pull out the impending vacancies to various boards and commissions. This information was posted in WOMENEWS (the NCSW newsletter that had grown in circulation to over 7,000 persons across the state). Women were encouraged to submit their applications for appointments to these boards and commissions.

NCSW received a grant from the Department of Labor, Women's Bureau to convene Round Table discussions on work related areas for Mid-Life Women in North Platte and McCook. Information from these discussions was reported to the Department of Labor, Women's Bureau to be reported to the President.

NCSW promoted the MS. Foundation's "Take Our Daughters to Work" campaign by working with the Department of Education in sending information to schools across the state regarding the campaign. This included activities for teachers to use with those students that remained in school for the day as well as eliciting their support for young women to accompany their parents or another adult into the work force.

# A Time of Change

ianna Else, Fairbury, chaired the Commission from 1993-96. She was elected to the Board of the National Association of Commissions for Women during her tenure.

NCSW organized a Women's Health Alliance to put together a health program for women across the state. The first phase of the program assisted the Department of Health in getting the word out to Nebraska women about the "Every Woman Matters" program on Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening. A grant was obtained to send teams of women out into the communities to tell about the program. The second phase was to build a network of women throughout the state to address women's health issues. This was the forerunner of the Annual Women's Health Symposium.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Women of Color Conference was held in Lincoln entitled "Appreciating Differences: The Many Faces of Nebraska Women".

The Commission developed materials on sexual harassment, including Model Sexual Harassment Polices for companies. These materials were distributed throughout Nebraska.

NCSW continued to promote and participate in the "Take Our Daughters to Work" campaign. NCSW also worked with the Bureau of Sociological research – UNL to collect data on childcare and establish a child care data base.

NCSW worked very closely with the Nebraska Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalition to inform the public on domestic violence and protection orders. NCSW worked with NDVSAC on the passage of legislation regarding protection orders.

In 1994 NCSW completed a year of research, compilation and writing for *The Women's Legal Rights Handbook*. NCSW published the Handbook and distributed it to law offices, legislators, and women across the state.

This year marked the beginning of NCSW's *Women of Distinction* Celebration. In 1994, Hazel Smith Davis was NCSW's first recipient of the *Women of Distinction* Honor. NCSW celebrated her life with a reception in Omaha. The U.S. West Women hosted the reception and the U.S. West Foundation provided NCSW a grant to create a display of Ms. Davis' documents and memorabilia from her long life as an activist on behalf of women.

The Commission worked with the U.S. Department of Labor – Women's Bureau on the "Working Women Count" initiative. Surveys were distributed throughout the state and responses for Nebraska were tallied by NCSW. Nebraska results were published by NCSW in "Working Women Count! A Report to the Nation and Nebraska."

NCSW was a co-organizer with Southeast Community College and other organizations of *the Women in the Trades Coalition*. The coalition applied for several grants and worked on a proposal to recruit 100 women for a pre-training 6 week course targeting trade areas in welding, truck driving and electrical technicians.

NCSW staff updated the National Association of Commissions for Women's *Organizational Handbook* that NCSW originally wrote in 1982. The updated version was made available to Women's Commissions at the National Conference in Topeka, Kansas. NCSW staff conducted workshops at the Conference on organizational skills for commissions.

NCSW received a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor – Women's Bureau to develop and implement a project entitled "Alternative Work Options for Women" for women recently released from the York Center for Women. The focus of the project was to improve employment possibilities. NCSW designed the program and contracted with a facilitator to conduct the program.

The "Hazel Smith Davis: Life of an Activist" display was designed, developed and promoted to groups throughout the state. The display was seen in several communities during the year.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Women of Color conference, "Celebrating Cultural Diversity: A Decade of Success and Challenges for Tomorrow" was held in Lincoln. The fledgling Women of Color Network was active during this conference. They expressed interest in assuming the Women of Color Conference.

The Commission worked with Nebraska ETV by researching and compiling information for a "Women's Health Yellow Pages." The Nebraska ETV ran a series of programs on Women's Health and published the "Women's Health Yellow Pages."

The 1995 Legislature heard testimony on combining the three advocacy commission (Nebraska Commission on the Status of Women, the Mexican-American Commission and the Commission on Indian Affairs). NCSW mounted a "Save the Commission" campaign. NCSW worked with the other agencies and women across the state to defeat the legislation.

The 11<sup>th</sup> Annual woman of Color Conference, "Collaboration, Cooperation, and Commitment: Building Strengths Using Our diversity" was held in Omaha. This was the final Conference that NCSW organized. The Women of Color Network assumed the continuation of this conference.

Stakeholders Meetings were organized in Scottsbluff, Columbus, Omaha and Lincoln to take the NCSW to the public and get feed back on employment issues for women as a follow-up to the "Working Women Count" survey conducted last year. Recommendations were forwarded as requested to President Clinton.

The Commission researched economic issues, initiated and cooperated in the development of "Women in Numbers: Working Women in Nebraska" source book with the Nebraska Department of Labor.

The Women's Health Alliance developed into the First Annual Women's Health Symposium. It was held in April at the First Methodist Church in Lincoln. Eight workshops were offered covering a wide range of women's health issues. It was also at this time the Executive Director, Rose Meile discovered a recurrence of breast cancer which ultimately took her life in September of that year.

The "Woman of Distinction" Celebration was held in March at the Capitol rotunda honoring Joan Rossiter Burney. A reception followed the celebration in the NW courtyard of the Capitol.

#### Loss of An Activist - Work Goes Onward

special "Woman of Distinction" Celebration was held in September of 1995, honoring Executive Director, Rose Meile, for her many years of advocacy on behalf of women across the state throughout her lifetime. Rose Meile died 6 weeks later.

Following the death of Rose Meile, Dianna Else, Chair, and Vice –Chair, Betty Peterson, provided staff leadership until a new director could be hired the following February.

In Conjunction with the Secretary of State's office and other women's organizations, NCSW organized a Statewide Celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Women's Right to Vote. The celebration was in the Northwest Courtyard of the State Capitol followed by a reception.

1996-97, Betty Peterson, Lincoln, Chaired the Commission. Joni Grey was hired in February as the Executive Director.

NCSW linked with over 50 organizations and planned and conducted a "Women's Vote Campaign", designed to increase women's voting participation throughout Nebraska. The campaign included a Press Conference, and Kick Off Rally in Lincoln that was duplicated throughout the state.

Dr. Kathleen Bliese was the 1996 "Women of Distinction" Honoree. A presentation of the award took place at a luncheon at the Governor's Mansion.

The Commission organized 19 sites in Nebraska for the National Working Women's Satellite Summit on "Economic Equity: Realities, Responsibilities & Rewards" with the U.S. Department of Labor – Women's bureau. This was followed by a Bi-Regional Satellite Conference – "The Working Women's Summit" that NCSW organized in 3 sites in Nebraska.

NCSW organized 5 teleconference sites for a National Satellite conference – "The United Nation's Women's Conference One Year Later". This conference included local programming involving women who had attended the UN Women's Conference in Beijing China.

In 1997 The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Health Symposium, "Women's Health: Issues Affecting Women and Their Families," was held at the Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln. Eleven workshops were offered from traditional health issues to alternative health issues. Nearly 300 persons attended the event.

The Nebraska Commission on the Status of Women co-sponsored with the Lincoln/Lancaster Women's commission the "We Have Come A Long Way" recognition of the role of African-American Women in history for February's Black History Month and "Just Look At Us Now!" recognition event for girls and women in sports and fitness.

The Annual "Women Of Distinction" honoree for 1997 was Helen Boosalis, former Lincoln Mayor. She was honored at a luncheon, with 80 persons attending.

NCSW continued it's long tradition of working for passage of legislation to improve the lives of women and their families. Some of those bills included: Increasing the state minimum wage; micro-enterprise development act; protection orders; legal services funding; and domestic violence reporting by law enforcement.

Judith Cross, Springfield, was chair during the 1997-98 year.

In July 1997, the office staff finally was increased to four full-time employees. Also during this year the office computer systems were upgraded and NCSW went online with it's own web page.

In the Fall of 1997, the commission wrote a 20 page protest to a 70+ page report for the Nebraska State Personnel Department making over 50 recommendations on how to improve "productivity." As a result, NCSW halted plans to reduce workers' leave time and prevented the creation of a "long-term" temporary employment category.

The Commission sought and received Governor sponsorship of a "Governor's Roundtable on Women in Non-traditional Jobs". The mission was to begin the process of developing a state plan for how to increase the participation of women in non-traditional jobs. As a result of the roundtable, the Governor created a Governor's Commission on Non-traditional Opportunities for Women.

NCSW in partnership with Central community College in Hastings, NE, and supported by funds from the U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau completed a "Video on Nebraska Women in Non-traditional Jobs". NCSW held a premiere in Hastings. The Commission developed a

packet of written information to accompany the video. It distributed 200 free videos to various programs and educational institutions.

The "Women of Distinction" Ceremony honored former Congresswoman Virginia Smith. The Celebration was held in the Capitol Rotunda, with speeches, a presentation of the Virginia Smith Day Proclamation, the presentation of the NCSW Women of Distinction Pin and the planting of a rose bush in the NW Courtyard of the Capitol (a tradition established with NCSW's 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual *Women of Distinction* Ceremony.)

The Annual Nebraska Women's Health Symposium was held at the Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln. Over 200 participants enjoyed hearing and obtaining signed book copies from Nebraska authors Mary Pipher and Lela Shanks. This was the first 2-day health conference with 10 workshops and over 20 exhibits.

Marvel Welch, Omaha, chaired the Commission for the 1998-99 year. Under her leadership, NCSW co-sponsored two "Single Parents Day" celebrations – one in Lincoln and one in York at the Center for Women.

Work began on planning activities for NCSW's 150<sup>th</sup> year celebration of Seneca Falls and the Women's Rights Movement. A Photo Retrospective of Nebraska Women Over the Past 150 years was planned. This included work from a student photo/essay contest for grades 9-12 and the work of a local photo artist and his display of Nebraska women photos projected onto various large canvas screens and flashed onto TV screens with accompanying verbal explanations. What emerged was a photo exhibit and lecture series on women in Nebraska history entitled "Out of the Shadows and Into the Light".

The essays, photos and history of Nebraska women for the past 150 years resulted in the publication, "Living the Legacy of Women's Rights: Celebrating the Lives of Nebraska Women 1848-1998".

The Photo Exhibit and Lecture Series "Out of the Shadows and Into the Light" opened in North Platte and was highly successful. It then moved to Columbus, where it also enjoyed enormous success.

The Commission had a very successful legislative session. It identified over 70 bills that it tracked through the session. Of the 8 priority bills NCSW were working, 6 resulted in the desired outcome. Legislation passed that NCSW supported included: creation of a Harassment Protection Order; expanded tax credits for child and dependent cares services; adopted unfair discrimination against subjects of abuse in insurance; expanded Medicaid to children; and NCSW defeated a measure to eliminate affirmative action in a constitutional amendment.

Linda Aerni was elected chair for the 1999-2000 year.

In August, 1999, NCSW co-sponsored a two-day workshop titled, *Pay Equity/Equal Pay/Comparable Worth* and *The Workforce Investment Act (WIA)*, with the U.S. Dept. of Labor, Women's Bureau, Kansas City, MO, and the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission.

In October, 1999, NCSW's Nebraska Women's Health Symposium expanded to include a one day health conference in Ogallala. The Ogallala Women's Health Retreat included 9 workshops. The reception of the "mini" conference was overwhelming with over 250 women attending the conference.

The "Out of the Shadows and Into the Light" photo exhibit and lecture series is scheduled to open in Lincoln in November, 1999. The Exhibit has attracted large audiences and excellent reviews. It has created high visibility for the Nebraska Commission on the Status of Women.